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# Personal and Impersonal God

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## Personal and Impersonal God

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SEVERAL times I have been asked why there is such a clash between Theosophy and Christianity, because the enquirer at our lectures, and particularly when reading some of our literature, notes that there is an attitude of what might be termed a veiled hostility towards the Christian religion.

Now the first point to note is that there is a clash between Theosophy and **every** religion, not always of the same kind, but there is a clash. Take, for instance, the clash between Theosophy and Buddhism, for in Buddhism as it exists in Burma, Ceylon and Siam, there is a denial of any soul in man, but in Theosophy one of the first axioms is that the permanent ego persists from incarnation to incarnation. Then there is a clash between Theosophy and Hinduism, not so much on the philosophical side, but because Theosophy denounces the whole caste idea as it exists, with the barring of the door to the lower castes from certain higher possibilities. There is a definite clash between Theosophy and Islam, because Theosophy proclaims there are other prophets than the Prophet Muhammad. Though a Muhammadan will admit that other prophets of God have appeared before, and reverence is given especially to Jesus Christ, he asserts that the Prophet Muhammad is the last of the prophets, and it is therefore our duty to follow the last whom God has sent. There is also a further clash between Theosophy and Islam on account of the doctrine of Reincarnation, and similarly so with Christianity and Zoroastrianism. So you see that Theosophy does clash with all kinds of accepted revelations.

But there is also another reason for a clash, and it is because Theosophy is against every kind of priestly domination, whether in Hinduism, Christianity or any

other religion; for where there is priestly domination (which does not mean any denial of "apostolic succession" and so on), it builds a doctrinal structure which is proclaimed sacrosanct. In Christianity, as anyone who reads history will know, there exists a record of oppression of all who differed from the ecclesiastical ideas of the day, and the martyrdom of such as Hypatia and Bruno is a matter of history. Throughout most of the centuries of Christianity, the persecution of one Christian section by another has been quite frequent. There is similarly a record of oppression in Islam. Muhammadans have not tolerated those who did not accept the Prophet Muhammad as the messenger of God, and have subjected them to penalties. So far has this oppression been carried out that even today there is on the part of the Muhammadans of Arabia hostility against the Muhammadans of Persia, due to dynastic quarrels which have nothing to do with Muhammad as the Prophet of God, for Persian Muhammadans accept the Prophet.

Then there was the suppression of the Mysteries in Christianity. One of the very great defects which arose in Christianity was that all the splendid traditions of the Mysteries and truths of the great philosophies of Greece were excluded, and the early church inculcated a more or less general belief that any kind of knowledge simply stood in the way of one's road to God.

Now, our attitude, and I refer particularly to those who have pledged themselves to make Theosophy a living power in their lives, may be said to be of a dual nature. Each one has to be firm in his faith, whatever it is. Faith is the very structure of our being, and we have to be firm in it. But at the same time we must not denounce the beliefs of others, except in the single instance where such beliefs involve an element of cruelty. Then we must take a stand; but where there is not that cruelty, we as students must not condemn teachings which others hold as necessary to their salvation.

However, there is a tradition in Theosophical circles in the West that Theosophy is anti-God. We have to accept that attitude as part and parcel of the baggage which we have brought from the past of the Society. There is nothing of it in India. The reason for this attitude of H. P. B. is the persecution by Christians of those who stood for truth, who were the messengers of the Masters.

There is one other aspect of this, that Theosophists are said to be particularly against the "Personal God" conception. They are definitely "anti-personal" in their idea of God, and some go to the extent of proclaiming that the Masters are against such a conception. For instance, they will quote you one of the letters of the Master K. H. to Mr. Sinnett which begins: "Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H." That seems fairly blunt and straight. It is perfectly true that as you read the Letters you find an antipathy to the idea of a Personal God. Here, however, people forget a statement in another letter of the Master K. H., which comes incidentally in a few lines but is nevertheless most important. This is the statement:

"Believe me, good friend, learn what you can under the circumstances, to viz.—the **philosophy** of the phenomena and our doctrines on Cosmogony, inner man, etc. This Subba Row will help you to learn, though his terms—he being an initiated Brahmin and holding to the **Brahmanical esoteric** teaching—will be different from those of the 'Arhat Buddhist' terminology. But essentially both are the same—**identical** in fact." (*The Mahatma Letters*, Letter LXXVI).

Those who know the philosophy of any philosophical Hindu like Subba Row know that there is an angle to this problem different from that of Buddhism. We must remember that the Master K. H. is a Buddhist abbot in Tibet, and therefore He and His pupils must necessarily present the Buddhist aspect of philosophy. Every Hindu believes in **both** a Personal and an Im-

personal God, as Subba Row did. He was a deist. He offered his prayers to the Personal God, but at the same time he knew the conception of the Impersonal Brahman. But as an Advaita Brahmin, he had more an impersonal conception of God than a personal one. Another pupil, Mohini Chatterji, was also a deist, but he was a Visishtadvaita Brahmin, and so relied more on the personal aspect of God than on the impersonal. Both these concepts exist in Hinduism and the complexity of the problem is vast.

Now in Theosophy we have a certain philosophy given us by our Adept Teachers, especially the Masters M. and K. H. Few seem aware of the teachings which the Master Serapis gave to Colonel Olcott in 1875 in New York. Here I will say something which may seem irreverent but is essential. We must not erect the teachings of our two Masters into dogmas, which necessarily must cancel out the teachings of every other Master. Each Master has His own standpoint. But as Theosophists, while we have the utmost reverence for our two Masters, equal reverence must be given to the teachings of other Masters like Shri Krishna, Jesus Christ, Zoroaster, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and others. I mean Their real teachings, not what is ascribed to Them. We must not enter into any narrow bigotry, erecting the Masters whom we know as saying the final word.

In all great philosophies we have a proclamation that an "Absolute" is the basis of everything. I have never been able to make clear to my mind why there must be an Absolute at all. However, all philosophies postulate the necessity of having this vast enveloping sphere which they call the Absolute. Even Herbert Spencer, the materialist, posited the Absolute; so too all the German Philosophies. All they say about it is that **IT IS**. The Hindu philosophies go somewhat further. When they postulate Brahman as the Absolute they posit certain attributes in the Absolute; one is Chit or energizing Consciousness, not a mere ab-

stract intelligence but a dynamic energizing Consciousness; a second characteristic is Ananda, Bliss. The third quality is Sat or Being or Be-ness. But what is meant by "being"? Though the word "being" connotes a kind of negative quiescent Reality, I think it may be described as having some kind of a directing personality in it. What do I mean by that? Is not that a sort of Personal God in the Absolute? I am of course merely theorizing.

Now, from the Absolute, there issues Ishvara, the Personal Deity. I cannot imagine that from an Absolute, which is the negation of anything that we can postulate as personality, there can issue a personality. That is why I say that there must be some kind of a **root of personality** in the Absolute, in the same kind of a way that in the tiny seed of a great banyan tree the tree is latent inside one cell. One must postulate that the root of Ishvara is in the Absolute; and since Ishvara is, as Creator-Preserver-Destroyer, a **directing personality**, therefore the root of that directing personality must exist in the Absolute. So when one says that the Absolute is Sat-Chit-Ananda, one implies that Sat or Being is a **directing** personality in **IT in principle**. There is also in the Absolute an Intelligence, Chit, which must be an energizing Consciousness **in principle**, for unless we postulate that, whence this cosmic, evolutionary planned and detailed action which manifests as the Intelligence of Ishvara? Without this idea of a root of personality in Brahman, we come to a mechanical conception of the nature of manifestation of the universe. This is the Buddhist idea. When the Absolute manifests as Ishvara and becomes the upper and the lower halves of a circle, to use the well known symbol, and the two halves interact (as flint striking iron makes a spark), then the latent Personality of God becomes active. This is the Personal God.

While Ishvara is the Personal Lord, there is behind Him a vast sphere of the Impersonal Godhead, and there will come a time at the end of this manifestation



when Ishvara reverts into His root nature as a principle of personality, and is no longer a Person.

So if we want to understand this problem we must understand both the nature of the Personal God whom we worship, and also of that vaster sphere in which He and we exist. How are we to define that higher sphere? One thing to remember is, that that Vastness IS, and that it is everything conceivable. In Hinduism the statement is that it is Sat-Chit-Ananda; Buddhism would simply say IT IS, without any quality that can be predicated of IT.

Now, any definition which we try to make must be "beside the mark." This is clearly recognized in Hindu teachings. There are innumerable philosophical works on the subject, but there is one place in one of the Upanishads where the truth is summed up in the statement that whatever another says concerning THAT, your answer must always be "Neti, Neti"—"It is never so, it is never so." Nothing that is manifested can ever describe what is un-manifested. So we are instructed that as we rise from experience to experience, and even see the glory of the highest of all the planes with all its manifestations, when we are almost on the verge of knowing what is "God," we still must say, "Neti, Neti." Whatever you discover on any manifested plane is still **not** THAT.

All this is very beautifully described in **The Light of Asia**, in the first sermon which the Lord Buddha gave.\* The first verse is:

OM, AMITAYA! measure not with words

Th' Immeasurable; nor sink the string of thought  
Into the Fathomless. Who asks doth err,

Who answers, errs. Say nought!

That is the true standpoint of Buddhism. The problem whether there is God or not is beyond the range of mere human intellect to solve.

\*It is not in the Lord's sermon, but Edwin Arnold nevertheless states the Buddhist position clearly. Amitaya means "immeasurable."

I have said that along our line of speculation the Absolute manifests as Ishvara, the Cosmic Logos. That is the first emanation, and therefore all the millions of Solar Logoi are within the Cosmic Logos, who enfolds in Himself the whole universe and energizes all Logoi and everything within them. The problem now is, How far will you go in your philosophical explorations? Will you, for instance, go from the Logos of our Solar System, God to us, to the Universal Logos, who of course is a Personality? If you say, "Thus far is enough for me; the Cosmic Logos shall be sufficient for me," then you will follow certain lines of teaching as to self-growth and salvation. But if you take the other attitude and say, "No, I must proceed to the Absolute Being. I do not deny the existence of the Cosmic Logos and Solar Logoi, but my goal is to pierce into that far greater Be-ness, to know the nature of the Absolute, even though all philosophers say I cannot do it"; if you take this second attitude, that your aim is to come to know, however little, what is the nature of the Absolute, there is for you no God to worship. Not that you deny the existence of a hierarchy of Logoi; but you are concerned not with them but to go beyond into the nature of the Absolute. But if your temperament is towards the Personal Logos, as a Unity or Trinity with the Hierarchies emanating from them, then there does exist a God for you to worship.

Now in all this where do you and I come in? What is our relation to the Solar Logos? There is one fact to go upon. I have my "being" **within** the circumscribing sphere of the Solar Logos. In Him I live and move and have my being. What is my relation to Him? Let us watch what happens under certain conditions. We have, for instance, a description of what takes place in those Temples in the Sixth Root Race colony, given by C. W. Leadbeater in **Man: Whence, How and Whither**. Each of us has a certain theme or note or series of colors in rainbow form, which is the "mark" of our nature. As we begin our worship we start with that,



pouring ourselves into it. Then as the Deva sends out his wonderful stream of influence, it has the effect of bringing each person up to his highest level and evoking from him the noblest love or devotion, etc., of which he is capable. That is what happens in the Crimson Temple:

It is noteworthy that every worshipper as he enters takes his seat on the pavement quietly and reverently, and then closes his eyes and passes before his mental vision a succession of sheets or clouds of colour, such as sometimes pass before one's eyes in the darkness just before falling asleep. Each person has an order of his own for these colours, and they are evidently to some extent a personal expression of him. This seems to be of the nature of the preliminary prayer on entering a church of the twentieth century, and is intended to calm the man, to collect his thoughts, if they have been wandering, and to attune him to the surrounding atmosphere and the purpose which it subserves. When the service commences the Deva materialises on the apex of his pyramid, assuming for the occasion a magnificent and glorified human form, and wearing in these particular Temples flowing vestments of rich crimson (the colour varies with the type of Temple, as will presently be seen).

His first action is to cause a flashing-out above his head of a band of brilliant colours somewhat resembling a solar spectrum, save that on different occasions the colours are in different order and vary in their proportions. It is practically impossible to describe this band of colours with accuracy, for it is much more than a mere spectrum: it is a picture, yet not a picture; it has within it geometrical forms, yet we have at present no means by which it can be drawn or represented, for it is in more dimensions than are known to our senses as they are now constituted. This band is the key-note or text of that particular service, indicating to those who understand it the exact object which it is intended to attain, and the direction in which their affection and aspiration must be outpoured. It is a thought expressed in the colour-language of the Devas, and is intelligible as such to all the congregation. It is materially visible on the physical plane, as well as on the astral and mental, for although the majority of the congregation are likely to possess at least astral sight, there may be still some for whom such sight is only occasional.

Each person present now attempts to imitate this text or key-note, forming by the power of his will in the air in front of

himself a smaller band of colours as nearly like it as he can. Some succeed far better than others, so that each such attempt expresses not only the subject indicated by the Deva but also the character of the man who makes it. Some are able to make this so definitely that it is visible on the physical plane, while others can make it only at astral and mental levels. Some of those who produce the most brilliant and successful imitations of the form made by the Deva do not bring it down to the physical plane.

The Deva, holding out his arms over the people, now pours out through this colour-form a wonderful stream of influence upon them—a stream which reaches them through their own corresponding colour-forms and uplifts them precisely in the proportion in which they have been successful in making their colour-forms resemble that of the Deva. The influence is not that of the Deva-priest alone, for above and altogether beyond him, and apart from the Temple or the material world, stands a ring of higher Devas for whose forces he acts as a channel. The astral effect of the outpouring is remarkable. A sea of pale crimson light suffuses the vast aura of the Deva and spreads out in great waves over the congregation, thus acting upon them and stirring their emotions into greater activity. Each of them shoots up into the rose-coloured sea his own particular form, but beautiful though that is, it is naturally of a lower order than that of the Deva, individually coarser and less brilliant than the totality of brilliancy in which it flashes forth, and so we have a curious and beautiful effect of deep crimson flames piercing a rose-coloured sea—as one might imagine volcanic flames shooting up in front of a gorgeous sunset.

This first outpouring of influence upon the people has the effect of bringing each person up to his highest level, and evoking from him the noblest affection of which he is capable. When the Deva sees that all are tuned to the proper key, he reverses the current of his force, he concentrates and defines his aura into a smaller spherical form, out of the top of which rises a huge column reaching upwards. Instead of extending his arms over the people he raises them above his head, and at that signal every man in the congregation sends towards the Deva-priest the utmost wealth of his affection and aspiration—pours himself out in worship and love at the feet of the Deity. The Deva draws all those fiery streams into himself, and pours them upward in one vast fountain of many-coloured flame, which expands as it rises and is caught by the circle of waiting Devas, who pass it through themselves and, transmuting it, converge it,

like rays refracted through a lens, until it reaches the great chief Deva of their Ray, the mighty potentate who looks upon the very LOGOS Himself, and represents that Ray in relation to Him.

That great Chieftain is collecting similar streams from all parts of his world, and he weaves these many streams into one great rope which binds the earth to the Feet of its God; he combines these many streams into the one great river which flows around those Feet, and brings our petal of the lotus close to the heart of the flower. And He answers. In the light of the LOGOS Himself shines forth for a moment a yet greater brilliancy; back to the great Deva Chieftain flashes that instant recognition; through him on the waiting ring below flows down that flood of power; and as through them it touches the Deva-priest expectant on his pinnacle, once more he lowers his arms and spreads them out above his people in benediction. A flood of colours gorgeous beyond all description fills the whole vast cathedral; torrents as of liquid fire, yet delicate as the hues of an Egyptian sunset, are bathing every one in their effulgence; and out of all this glory each one takes to himself that which he is able to take, that which the stage of his development enables him to assimilate.

All the vehicles of each man present are vivified into their highest activity by this stupendous down-rush of divine power, and for the moment each realises to his fullest capacity what the life of God really means, and how in each it must express itself as love for his fellow-man. This is a far fuller and more personal benediction than that poured out at the beginning of the service, for here is something exactly fitted to each man, strengthening him in his weakness and yet at the same time developing to its highest possibility all that is best in him, giving him not only a tremendous and transcendent experience at the time, but also a memory which shall be for him as a radiant and glowing light for many a day to come. This is the daily service—the daily religious practice of those who belong to this Ray of affection.

In all the other Temples, blue, green and yellow there is the same offering upwards and the response downwards. This description gives a far away glimpse of the supreme mystery that the Solar Logos enfolds us; He feeds us; He is the matrix like the mother's womb which nourishes the embryo till it can live a separate

existence. So we "live and move and have our being" in Him.

But are we **created** by Him? There I would myself say, No, for we are Monads and are rooted in the Cosmic Logos. But we are only **potential** Monads within the Cosmic Logos. It is the Solar Logos who brings these potential Monads into Himself and there fosters them, as the mother's womb does the embryo. He feeds us and draws us out night and day. It is His function to bring out the monadic powers of each Monad into activity.

You can worship the Solar Logos, as Father, Mother or Son, for He is our Mediator. Yet as the same time, if you are searching for the root of being you must go beyond even the Cosmic Logos.

It is interesting to note what was the attitude of the Lord Buddha to this problem. All sorts of questions were asked of Him on this question, Is there God? His answer always was to this effect: "The question is beside the mark. It is not rightly put. I am not here to answer that question. I am here to tell you of the cause of suffering and the way out of suffering." He never denied the existence of God nor asserted it. His attitude was once given in a parable. If you find a man wounded by an arrow, is it to the point to ask: "From what tree's wood is this arrow made? From the feathers of what bird is this arrow tipped?" What the wounded man asks of you is to have the arrow plucked out; he is not interested in your speculations. His need is healing, not philosophy.

Another thing we must remember is that the Masters cannot in reality contradict one another, for They are one with Truth. They may **seem** to contradict, because They have to state in terms of words the nature of that which is "fathomless." For instance, the Master K. H. says, "There is no god worthy of a capital letter," and yet when teaching Krishnaji He uses the word God. The Master Serapis ends a letter to Colonel Olcott: "God's blessing upon thee, Brother mine." He

concludes three other letters invoking God's blessing. And in one letter this: "God lead thee, Brother mine, and may He crown thy noble efforts with success." There are contradictions, but contradictions are of the very nature of manifested life. Think of a disc, set it in motion going in a certain direction. Observe the direction, but also note that by the very nature of the disc it has two sides. What is important is not the fact that the disc always faces two contradictory directions but the direction in which it is going. You cannot describe a disc exactly except in terms of a contradiction.

We have something of that today in physics. They say you cannot describe completely the nature of the ultimate particle of matter, the electron. You can make an accurate statement as to its velocity; but you cannot at the same time give an accurate statement of its position at the instant you define its velocity. If you give a correct statement about its position, then the statement about its velocity is only approximate. By the very nature of the root of the physical universe, these two important factors, velocity and position, cannot be equated, except approximately. There is a formula which gives this approximation. This is the "Principle of Indeterminacy." Also, once you have stated what the electron is, the next instant that statement does not apply. The moment you have observed an electron you have changed it by your observation, and your first statement about it is not valid for your second observation. We cannot understand this Principle of Indeterminacy except in terms of higher mathematics. Mere argument does not give the solution.

On this we have an example in Hinduism, in the name Muni for a sage and saint. Muni means the Silent One. A Sannyasi often makes a vow of silence for a certain period, and behind that is the fact that it is "in the silence" that he begins to enter into a realization of the mystery. But each needs, however,

before he goes into the silence, to possess the experiences which all his past incarnations have given him. Out of these experiences is born the truth which is sought. Each will come to a part of the solution by himself, in the silence. Therefore though we may by philosophical discussion realize the truth to some extent, we shall never grasp the entire truth. Therefore we must never try to impose our **partial** realization upon another.

There is one supreme fact which is clear on this line of inquiry. It is that you can never understand **THAT** till you begin to understand **THIS**, which is manifestation. You cannot know **THAT** merely out of abstract principles of philosophy. The universe, even with its *Maya*, has a value for us in our journey to **THAT**. Similarly you cannot completely understand the nature of God till you begin to understand at least partially the nature of man, for man is God here below. Therefore then we need to go outwards into manifestation, and note the interrelations of manifestation among men, note the relations between workers, friends, enemies and so on. All our human problems are a part of the transcendent spiritual problem.

Further, the problem is different with each of us. Some discover something of God first, and then afterwards they begin to understand man. On the other hand, others discover much of man first, and then they come to something of the realization of God. But once again, the practical advice is, "Say naught." Argument and discussion lead nowhere. If I were to say this in India, the typical Hindu will say, "All the same, what an exciting and exhilarating adventure we can have 'getting nowhere.'" That is India all over, throughout the ages—the would-be philosopher philosophizing, while on all sides is human misery, which scarcely arrests his attention.

My advice to you is to do what the Virgin Mary did: "And all they that heard it wondered at those things



which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

There is one absolutely essential factor, in this problem of understanding the Reality. After you have so pondered in your heart, **you must create**. What? Deeds of love and sacrifice, new gifts to God or man, hopes, dreams, philosophies, arts and religions, it little matters what. You must first be utterly certain what is your "mark," and then go straight to it, as the arrow goes straight to its mark, ignoring everything else. When you have created, you must "stand by" that creation, unwavering and loyal to it, however much all men may deny its value. I shall here always remember how Dr. Annie Besant used to recite with fervour these verses from Myers' poem **St. Paul**:

Lo if some strange intelligible thunder  
Sang to the earth the secret of a star,  
How should ye catch, for terror and for wonder,  
Shreds of the story that was pealed so far?

Scarcely I catch the words of his revealing,  
Hardly I hear him, dimly understand,  
Only the Power that is within me pealing  
Lives on my lips and beckons to my hand.

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny:  
Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

Rather the earth shall doubt when her retrieving  
Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,  
Rather than he for whom the great conceiving  
Stirs in his soul to quicken into God.

Ay, tho' Thou then shouldst strike him from his glory,  
Blind and tormented, maddened and alone,  
Even on the cross would he maintain his story,  
Yes, and in hell would whisper, I have known.

**"I have known."** That is what she said as Hypatia and Bruno, when the bestial Christians scraped her

flesh to the bone with oyster shells and the emissaries of the Pope bound him to the stake and lit round him the devouring fire.



In conclusion, I have this to add. The problem on which I have addressed you fascinates me, but only **intellectually**. It does not grip me heart and soul. Yet I have my own form of worship of the Personal God as the Greek Goddess of Wisdom, Pallas Athena. An exquisite marble statue of Pallas as a girl is in the vestibule to the Shrine Room here in this Centre. As I lie in bed, it stands a few feet from my head on the other side of a door, and this Pallas suffices me better than any image of God created by sculptor or painter since the days of Greece.

The eternal problem for me which I am discovering is not that of an Impersonal or Personal God, but of God as man. I do not mean by **God as man** God on earth as an Avatar, as the Incarnation of God as Jesus Christ, or Shri Krishna. I mean God in man as the human man, woman, and child. To know these "fragments of the Divine," who are struggling even as I am struggling through darkness to Light, as the very Solar Logos and Cosmic Logos (and both are one), to know each as a God of Gods, it is this that I have discovered, and am discovering more and more each hour. From that discovery has come whatever I have so far created; from it will come the greater creations still in lives to come as a "Brother of the Glorious Mystery."

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